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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000799

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [PBTS](#) [KU](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAIT-IRAQ BORDER: NEW COALITION CROSSING OPENS

REF: A. KUWAIT 730  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 33  
[1](#)C. 06 KUWAIT 4638  
[1](#)D. 06 KUWAIT 4173

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary: On May 15, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Chief and Kuwait Customs Advisor Jim Piatt conducted a site visit of newly-opened Khabari Crossing (K Crossing) to assess overall operations. The first convoy arrived from Iraq on May 15 at 0130. In general, the opening went smoothly. As of Emboff's departure from the site on May 15 at 1430, K-Crossing had successfully processed four scheduled southbound convoys of approximately 45 trucks each and two unscheduled southbound convoys - one British convoy of 24 vehicles and one Danish convoy containing ten vehicles. In addition to the arrival of unscheduled convoys, Kuwait Customs decided to double inspect 100 percent of civilian or "white" assets traveling in mixed convoys, resulting in unexpected delays. Kuwait Customs officials have said they will continue this vigorous if redundant inspection regime for several months as a deterrent. U.S. military officials also experienced some difficulty in locating Kuwait Customs and Immigrations officials upon the convoys' arrival. An early notification system to alert Kuwaiti officials should alleviate this delay. End summary.

Customs' 100 Percent Inspection Raises Eyebrows  
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[1](#)2. (C/NF) The new coalition crossing point between Kuwait and Iraq went operational on May 15. While generally problem-free, some unexpected delays are occurring as procedures are ironed out. Under a 2005 Kuwait-U.S. Border MOU, all non-military ("white") trucks are inspected by x-ray upon entering Kuwait. At K-Crossing for now, Kuwait Customs are further subjecting all of the "white" trucks to a physical search after the scan is complete. Embassy Customs rep advised Kuwait Customs officials onsite that this practice is redundant unless the scan or some other indicator raises suspicions in the minds of the Customs inspector. He later checked with Kuwait Customs Director General Ibrahim Al-Ghanim and discovered that this dual inspection is indeed Kuwait Customs policy. DG Al-Ghanim told Emboff he is determined to demonstrate that Kuwait Customs is going to be tough in order to dissuade truckers from transporting any prohibited items or contraband into Kuwait. DG Al-Ghanim said that this show of force will be in effect for three months. (Note: At a recent press conference covered by the English-language daily Arab Times on May 19, DG Al-Ghanim reportedly expressed concern about the level of smuggling of drugs and arms into Kuwait from Iraq and said Kuwait Customs has intensified inspection procedures at all borders,

including Khabari. "We received a number of complaints from American soldiers," he said, "but we cannot compromise on national security, and we will continue to perform our duties. He added, "We randomly check cars of Americans." End Note). (Comment: If Customs continues its 100 percent inspection policy, continued delays should be expected on the processing of southbound convoys, with a ripple effect on trucks that arrive on the heels of a convoy undergoing inspection. There was also reportedly some difficulty locating Customs officers when the first convoy from Iraq arrived at 0130. Once on hand, there were only two Customs officers to process the entire convoy. End Comment).

Southbound (into Kuwait)  
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13. (C/NF) From May 15-18, the first three days of operations, the U.S. military planned to operate 12-hour windows for northbound and southbound convoys. On May 15, southbound convoys were allowed entry into Kuwait from 0100 to 1300 and northbound convoys from 1300 to 0100. Two-way traffic is expected to begin on May 18. As noted in ref A, all convoys entering Kuwait are directed to the "504 Yard" for inspection by the Kuwaiti Border Police (KBP). Initial reports from U.S. military officials onsite indicate that KBP is completing its inspections in approximately 10 minutes, ensuring the swift passage of convoys to the primary inspection by Kuwait Customs and Immigration officials. On May 15, two southbound convoys arrived without prior notification, one British and the other Danish. A British convoy arrived in the morning without any advance notice and a Danish convoy, dispatched by the British, arrived around 1400 thus delaying a dispatch of a northbound convoy at 1430. U.S. Movement Control will address this issue.

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Northbound  
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14. (C/NF) Emboff also observed the first northbound convoy process through Kuwait Customs and Immigration on the afternoon of May 15. Kuwait Customs had three of six booths open and the trucks cleared quickly. When they pulled up to Immigration, however, there were no Immigration officers manning the booths. It took 15 minutes for U.S. officials onsite to locate an Immigration officer.

Comment  
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15. (C/NF) Not surprisingly, there are some kinks to work out with Kuwaiti officials on the new border crossing. Some of these can be handled by the U.S.-Kuwait border working group that has met on a number of occasions over the last year. It is clear that improved communications are necessary in getting Customs and Immigration personnel in position prior to the arrival of convoys. Because of the sprawling nature of the border complex, a means of alerting officials to incoming traffic, such as radios or a loudspeaker, would be extremely useful. As for the seemingly redundant inspections by Kuwait Customs, it appears the DG is personally invested in an early show of force, both for truckers and to demonstrate to the Kuwait public that he is not doing special favors for the U.S. In the few days that have elapsed since the opening of K-Crossing, we have not heard further complaints from U.S. military officials on the handling of white trucks, but we will monitor this aspect in particular and intervene as necessary to ensure the most timely passage of convoys to and from Iraq. DHS Customs liaison and Econoff will visit K-Crossing again on May 21.

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LeBaron